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EAID
SUBJECT: TFHA01: EMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE EARTHQUAKE SITREP as of 1800,
February 8, 2010

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Preval departed February 8 to Ecuador for a UNASUR summit, reportedly planning to return February 10. The Canadian Government has proposed to build a temporary administrative complex for the GOH. Commercial air traffic could partially resume as early as February 20. The National Police and Ministry of Justice are working to portray a pro-active approach to tracking down fugitives, while peaceful protests (up to several hundred people) continue and people start returning to Port-au-Prince. Parliament has upped its criticism of the GOH, but is unlikely to influence President Preval's ways. End Summary.

GOVERNMENT NEWS

¶2. (SBU) President Preval is expected to attend the UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) summit in Ecuador, at the invitation of Ecuador's president, Rafael Correa (Note: Correa visited Port-au-Prince on January 29). During a press conference over the weekend, Preval urged the population to remain patient and calm despite frustrations with aid deliveries.

¶3. (SBU) The Canadian Government proposed to build a temporary administrative complex to house various government ministries destroyed during the earthquake. A site has already been selected in the Croix-des-Bouquets area, east of Port-au-Prince.

COMMERCIAL AIR TRAFFIC

¶4. (SBU) American Airlines (AA) is in the process of finalizing its request to the Federal Aviation Administration to resume commercial flights to Port-au-Prince. Minister of Finance, Ronald Baudin, announced on February 6 that flights would be resuming soon, but would not confirm a date. The initial plan would be for up to four AA flights a day to arrive during daylight hours, which would allow the airport to support relief and U.S. sustainment flights during the evening. The burden is on AA to prove that Port-au-Prince airport meets U.S. safety and security standards. AA commercial flights could resume as early as February 19-20.

POLICE AND SECURITY

15. (SBU) The National Police announced it will post pictures of escaped prisoners around town starting this week. An internal government proposal was floated to form a fugitive pursuit team, of HNP officers with international support, to begin focusing on making arrests. The Ministry of Justice has attempted to demonstrate its pro-active efforts by focusing on the fugitives and pursuing the case of ten American citizens arrested for alleged child trafficking.

16. (SBU) Peaceful protests (up to several hundred people) continue sporadically, including in the southern city of Jacmel, where protesters denounced the way NGOs are distributing aid bypassing local and national government structures. Canadian Embassy officials in Jacmel told PolOff of their doubts about the capacity of local authorities, including the mayor, to manage the delivery of relief.

17. (SBU) As aid delivery and cash for work programs remain targeted in and around Port-au-Prince, people who had initially fled to rural areas have begun returning to the capital, adding to existing pressures on infrastructure and humanitarian aid needs. The risk of violence springing from IDP camps remains. For example, the spontaneous settlement in Champs de Mars, in the National Palace area, comprises up to 20,000 people from different neighborhoods with concerns that gang and neighborhood rivalries could emerge if basic needs cannot be continually met through humanitarian aid.

PARLIAMENT

18. (SBU) A preliminary report in the Chamber of Deputies criticized the government's lack of leadership and deemed aid delivery to be inefficient. Prime Minister Bellerive and some key ministers are expected at the Lower Chamber on February 9, one week after their appearance at a Senate hearing. Concurrently, Senator Youri Latortue called for the creation of a new consensus government on a radio show, citing the inadequacy of the government's leadership.

19. (SBU) Comment: Parliament is increasing its criticism of the aid delivery mechanisms, targeting the GOH and NGOs. Parliament would have to approve an extension to the state of emergency instituted by President Preval beyond the initial 30 days (expiring February 16). This appears unlikely, unless Preval makes concessions to parliamentarians' demands for changes in government or increased control of the relief delivery mechanisms. Preval may choose to confront Parliament by pointing out its contested legitimacy (parliamentarians' mandate expired in mid-January, but was extended until mid-May by a Lower Chamber vote, deemed unconstitutional by observers). Preval may be inclined to continue conducting government affairs under a "de facto" state of emergency without official parliamentary approval, while making concessions only on a limited basis. End Comment.
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